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ABSTRACT

The freshmen orientation programs offered by the colleges and universities that hold membership in the Pittsburgh Council of Higher Education (PCHE) were studied, and recommendations for a comprehensive orientation process were suggested. Interviews with three individuals for each program at nine institutions were sought; attention was directed to: goals and philosophies, content and format, staffing problems, evaluations, funding, and changes over the past five years. Eleven of 19 institutional respondents stated that their orientation program had both developmental and service aspects. The administrators felt that students needed to be aware of the counseling center, career development office, and dean of student affairs. The most common objectives of PCHE orientation programs were to familiarize students with the physical environment, expose various resources, relieve anxiety, and assist the student in developing an identity and a relationship with peers. A developmental model of orientation was proposed by which an orientation committee composed of students, faculty, and staff would determine program goals and format. A list of 16 recommendations resulting from the study and a literature review are included. (SW)

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# Orientation Programs
# At Colleges and Universities Within
# The Pittsburgh Council of Higher Education

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## Introduction

Orientation programs are developed to assist new students in understanding the customs and milieu of their college or university. This process should help students understand and feel comfortable within their new environment. To implement a successful orientation process for new students, orientation staffs must be aware of the developmental needs of incoming freshmen and be knowledgeable of the components of a successful campus orientation program.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the freshmen orientation programs offered by the colleges and universities which hold membership in the Pittsburgh Council of Higher Education (PCHE). Specifically, this study examined the following areas of each program: goals and philosophies; content; format and staffing problems; evaluations; funding; and changes over the past five years. In addition, a review of the literature examined the developmental needs of incoming freshmen and reviewed the life cycle and developmental tasks.

## Developmental Needs of Incoming Freshmen

Mott (1977) suggested that the first step in solving orientation problems is to assess the character of the campus while Mueller (1961) stated that no program of college personnel

work can be contemplated unless it is grounded in the needs of the campus youth group. Both authors agreed that students' needs are an important aspect in the development of an orientation program and must be taken into consideration.

In addition, Mueller (1961) found that the college student has the need to know, the need for self realization, the need to adjust and the need for integration. In addition, she stated that college student's problems can be classified as breaking away from the family, choosing a vocation, establishing satisfactory relationships with the opposite sex, and integrating the personality.

Tollefson (1975) said that the concepts of cultural shock and loss of identity afflicts many entering students. In addition, the needs of beginning freshmen are different from those of upperclass students. Tollefson suggested that it is important to minimize this cultural shock and loss of identity by maximizing the development of a sense of community for entering students.

McCleneghan, Sims, and Suddish (1974) conducted a study at seven college campuses and found that freshmen encounter many personal and academic problems. However, a crucial aspect to both of these types of problems is that the freshman student

normally comes from an established milieu where a constant and reliable source of information existed. Once the student arrives on campus, a new system to meet their informational needs must develop. The authors titled this process dislocation, which is the disruption of existing lines of communication and the development of new ones.

Truit (1970), in describing the "Image of Today's Student", refered to the seven unfinished developmental tasks of college age students which include: Changing from relations of dependence upon one's parents and older people to those of independence, dealing with authority, learning to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity. developing a mature sexuality, finding security while developing feelings of competence, developing values, and obtaining knowledge of delicate and complex matters.

Lynch (1970) reviewed evidence that indicates a major change in students values during the first six or eight weeks of the freshman year. She concluded that the first few weeks of the freshman year sets the tone for the student's college life.

Sagaria (1980) indicated that attrition is heaviest during the freshman year and agreed with Cope and Hanna (1975) who said that persistence in college is directly related to how well the

individual and milieu correlate. In addition, Tinto (1975) stressed the importance for the student to be integrated into the academic and social systems of the university or college.

Margolis (1976) found that going to college is the first extended time period away from home for most freshmen. One of the first tasks they have to accomplish is learning how to organize their life. Decisions have to be made on such matters as what courses in which to enroll, when to eat, what to wear, and how to interact with the opposite sex. Margolis said most freshmen do not get what they need during the first few weeks of school and this causes homesickness, adjustment problems, and college cultural shock.

Siryk (1980) conducted a study to identify high risk college students at the University of Iowa. The results indicated that students who did not continue were characterized as being less socially and academically adjusted. He concluded that colleges and universities should be concerned with student and college environment interaction and the quality of this interaction.

Sherer (1980) said that relationships, assertiveness, and problem solving are three issues that face today's college student. In order to assist the student with these issues, she suggested that a continuing orientation program could be helpful.

Sagaria, Higginson & White (1980) conducted a study on the needs of entering freshmen. Results indicated that both personal and academic issues are important, but that academic concerns have priority. The implications of this study are that a restructuring of the traditional orientation program is necessary. The authors suggested that students' most pressing concerns should be addressed first by focusing on first semester course scheduling, academic information resources, and curricular options available. After these issues have been addressed, the orientation program should focus on student life outside the classroom.

Johnson (1972) suggested that colleges neglect their freshmen after considerable coddling during the admissions process. This is unfortunate because he said that the freshmen year is crucial for success in college. He emphasized the need for coordinated freshman year that would enable freshmen to better adjust to the college environment.

The young adult has specific needs and encounters a series of developmental tasks based upon age and level of development. New college students have additional concerns such as dealing with displacement, choosing a career, and coping with academic and other personal problems. How a student copes with these

situations may determine his or her eventual success in college.

The first few weeks on campus have the greatest impact on the student. It is then that the student does or does not become integrated with both the academic and social systems of the university or college. Successful integration into college life is an important factor in the need-fulfillment and developmental learning that occur during this stage. An effective orientation program can, therefore, be the first and most important step toward a student's future social and academic achievement.

Methodology

Nine institutions were summarized in this study with three individuals (chief student affairs officers, faculty or staff members responsible for orientation, and student directors) targeted for interviews. An interview guide with sixteen questions, both structural and open, was prepared and utilized in each interview.

Analysis of Data

In order to analyze the data and make subsequent recommendations, a developmental model of orientation was proposed. This model suggested that orientation committees, composed of students, faculty and staff, should develop goals,

access student needs and determine if their particular orientation will be a process or a program. Once this planning stage has been conducted, a comprehensive program should include summer, fall, parent and continuing orientation components if it is to be developmental. The following is an overview of the data collected.

1. Eleven of nineteen respondants stated that their orientation program has both developmental and service aspects.

2. The dean of student affairs, counseling center and career development office were the service areas which administrators felt students needed to be aware.

3. Only one individual interviewed specifically mentioned any of the contemporary authors on developmental theory and only 40 percent had a clear understanding of this concept.

4. The most common objectives of PCHE orientation programs was to familiarize the student with the physical environment, expose various resources, relieve anxiety, and assist the student in developing an identity and a relationship with peers.

5. Six of nine institutions mentioned the three major needs of incoming freshmen listed in the literature review (social concerns, academic concerns, and finding a niche).

6. Orientation is performed primarily by the student affairs department at all institutions surveyed. However, the person responsible for orientation had other responsibilities at all but one institution.

7. Only four of nine institutions utilize a student orientation director. However, all used upper class students to assist with orientation.

8. Two of the nine institutions pay their students involved with orientation.

9. Faculty involvement at PCHE institutions is limited, with only two campuses responding that faculty is involved with planning the program.

10. Seven of the nine institutions have some type of summer orientation program, with the primary emphasis being on advising, registration, and testing.

11. Eight out of nine institutions utilized a fall orientation program ranging from one to six days. One institution takes incoming freshmen off-campus for three days. The most common programs occurring during this time period are: dances, movies, meeting with upperclass counselors, activity fairs, and get acquainted mixers.

12. All nine PCHE colleges and universities implement a parent orientation program. The most common components include question and answer sessions, what to expect as parents, and the opportunity to meet various faculty and staff.

13. Only one institution offers a continuing orientation course required for freshmen.

14. Three institutions fund their orientation program by university funding in a student affairs budget, three charge fees, and three utilize a combination of both. Budgets range from $5,000 to $100,000.

15. Eight of nine institutions stated that they evaluate their orientation program, although only four distribute evaluation forms to freshmen.

16. All institutions surveyed believe their orientation program is effective.

Summary and Recommendations

The data for this study were analyzed on a descriptive basis and therefore no comparisons were made. The major findings of this study suggest that orientation directors of PCHE institutions have other responsibilities within student affairs divisions and staffing patterns vary considerably; institutions offer unique social programs to address students' developmental

needs, but academic, career, and emotional issues were almost nonexistent; there is a lack of knowledge concerning developmental theory; continuing orientation courses and seminars at PCHE institutions are minimal; and students and faculty are not totally involved with orientation at most institutions.

As a result, the following recommendations have been developed to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive orientation process based on the proposed developmental model. While these recommendations are based on the data collected, they have universal application.

1. Chief student affairs officers should provide opportunities for professional development in developmental theory.

2. Faculty, staff and students should come to a consensus on which services are vital to new student survival.

3. A mutually agreeable set of written goals, objectives, and implementation strategies for orientation programs at all institutions must be developed.

4. Incoming freshmen should be periodically surveyed by each institution to determine their specific needs.

5. The importance of orientation should be established in relation to other student affairs areas on campus. If it is determined that orientation is an integral function, then professional staff must be permitted to devote more time to this area.

6. An active central orientation committee comprised of students, faculty, and staff should be formed at each institution to improve communications and assist the orientation staff.

7. Since all but one of the professional orientation staff have additional duties, institutions should consider appointing or selecting a student director and assistant director for orientation. Not only does this provide assistance for the staff members, but it also offers the student an excellent leadership experience.

8. Colleges and universities should give serious consideration to providing some type of stipend for student leaders so that they can design a fall orientation program during the summer months.

9. Since upperclass students play a vital role as peer counselors during orientation, a credit course or seminar would assure that they are properly trained.

10. The top administrators of each university need to become aware of the positive benefits of faculty involvement during orientation so that they can encourage faculty participation.

11. Summer, fall, parent, and continuing orientation programs must all occur if orientation is to be truly a developmental process.

12. More attention should be given to academic, career, emotional, life styles, and autonomy issues during orientation program.

13. Since a student cannot be oriented to campus in only one week, student affairs staff should exert a genuine effort to obtain approval for credit continuing orientation courses.

14. With dwindling resources at many institutions, new ways of obtaining funds both on and off-campus must be investigated.

15. New students should have the opportunity to evaluate each aspect of the orientation program.

16. Empirical research should be conducted to determine what effects orientation has on the development, retention, and satisfaction of students.

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